

Virginia Swimming Officials Spring Newsletter

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Welcome to Spring!

Since I have a little time on my hands, not sure why, I thought I would shoot you all a newsletter about officiating! On behalf of the Officials Committee, I want to thank all of you for your support for our athletes! Although our meets are currently held in check (and for good reason) VSI could not have run over 72 meets to date without you! Eventually, we will defeat this virus and I look forward to the days we are all back on the pool deck supporting our athletes.

What's your call?

I've been rummaging through a few other LSC's newsletters and some have a staple rules question in each edition. I thought that would be a great addition to our newsletters and provide an opportunity to dig into our rulebook. I will include one situation with a resolution in this and every follow-on newsletter. The resolution will be posted on the last page. Here is the first one:

Situation: At a local timed finals meet, the Deck Referee blows a short series of whistles directing the swimmers to prepare to swim. All swimmers move behind their block except lane three who is missing. After looking for the missing swimmer without success, the Referee blows the long whistle for the swimmers to step up. The field is then turned over to the Starter who issues the "take your mark" command and, when all swimmers are stationary, sounds the device to start the race. Immediately thereafter the lane three swimmer jumps up on the block and dives into the pool. Question: What should the Referee do?

Succession Plan

In the Fall newsletter, we provided a link to our VSI succession plan. The intent of the plan is to show you the path in becoming a leader within the LSC. If your son or daughter is committed to swimming, I can honestly say, it is wonderful opportunity to give back to a sport that they love that has helped them grow into mature adults. If you have not reviewed it, click on the link: <http://www.virginiaswimming.com/vsi/Official/Resource/recruitment/VSI%20Succession%20Plan.pdf>

Truthfully, we need Officials to fill slots for mentoring at N2/N3 level; Officials to run championship and seasonal meets as Meet, deck or administrative referee's, starters, chief judges and administrative personnel. Our plan provides the details, and it is not written in stone. Rather the document is fluid by design that will guide you through the process. We have nothing to hide, so if you are interested, send a note to your Club Officials Chair, District Chair or me and we will be happy to get you on the right path.

Other Positions on Deck

There may be positions that you are interested in training, or you may know other parents who sit in the stands, at every meet, who may be interested in Officiating. As most of you know, there are commonly two groups of officials working a swim meet. The "wet deck" and the "dry deck". The dry deck can consist of a Administrative Official, Timing Equipment Operator, and at some meets an Administrative Referee. S&T is not the only entry level position for officiating, we also have Administrative Official and Timing Equipment Operators.

What does the Administrative Official (AO) do?

Do you like working with computer software and want to dive into the administrative side of swimming? Have you wonder why the scoreboard time may differ from an official time? Training as an AO may be your next endeavor into our sport. AOs manage the meet software that we use to provide the officials times, print heat sheets, lane timer slips, labels for awards, complete scratches for positive check-in, seed events and even set-up swim-offs. The software we use is called Meet Manager and is widely employed at Summer League meets as well. If you know people who are working with Meet Manager at Summer League, this is a great position for them at USA Swimming meets.

The AO works closely with the Timing Equipment Operator (TEO). For the majority of our meets, we have three timing systems. To refrain from regurgitating the rule book, Article 102.24.3a defines the approved timing systems.

The AO will become very familiar with all three timing systems, and when to use them, in order to determine the official times. For example, in a backstroke event, a swimmer in Lane 3 completes their swim. Lane 3 on the scoreboard shows several dashes as the time. Then, a few moments later a time pops up for Lane 3. So what happened? Usually this happens when the swimmer missed the pad. The dashes indicate the timers buttons recorded a time before the pad was touched. Then when the swimmer finally hits the pad, a time shows up on the scoreboard. The AO is the one who looks over all of the data from that race and ensures the correct time is recorded for that swimmer.

The AO and Timing Equipment Operator (TEO) work as a team. The TEO is watching each touch on the pads, including the finish. The TEO should notice that the pad was missed on the finish and will make a note "late pad or LP" next to lane 3 on their heat sheet. The TEO will pass this information over the AO which helps the AO resolve the timing error for that heat.

When the race data is retrieved from the timing console into Meet Manager, the AO reviews all of the data. They will also review the lane timer cards to verify each swimmer swum in their assigned lane, mark any disqualifications in the software and print the results. Meet Manager has become very user friendly and it actually highlights potential timing errors that must be resolved by the AO. This position is a great introduction to understanding the administrative side of swimming.

What does the Timing Equipment Operator (TEO) Do?

TEOs are trained to set up, operate and monitor the timing console. In our LSC the timing console can either be one manufactured by Daktronics, Colorado Timing Systems or Omega. In principle, all timing consoles work the same. Basically, they receive an incoming start signal when the starter goes off, which starts an internal clock in the console. Each pad is wired to the console as well as all of the buttons. Prior to the session, the events are downloaded into the timing console in order to track the distance and based on touches. For example an event that is 100-yards, the timing console should see two touches if pads are only used at the starting end. If pads are wired on both ends (start and turn end), the timing console should see four touches. The TEO is training to set up this equipment, check to make sure everything is working correctly and monitor the touches during the swims. They will also watch for faulty pads or buttons during the course of the session and have those replaced so everything is working correctly.

Once a race is started, the TEO will look at the timing console clock to make it is running. Then, they will note the race number from the timing console onto their heat sheet, turn off any lanes that do not have swimmers and mark their heat sheet accordingly. Also, as noted above, they will make notes on their heat sheet if they observed any missed pad, late pads and late or no buttons for each heat.

For distance events, they are also tracking touches. The starter will usually double check with the TEO to ensure they are going to ring the bell on the correct lap.

If you are interested or know someone who is interested in training for AO or TEO, let your club officials chair and your district chair know and they will set you up with a training card.

One other position for advancement from S&T is Chief Judge (CJ). The CJ position is the 'Assistant and Mentor to all Stroke and Turn Officials'. CJs are also referred to as the "eyes and ears of the Deck Referee." We have all worked meets where there is no CJ and when possible we always like to have at least one. CJ's are an extension of the Deck Referee for adjudicating a S&T call, ensuring S&T officials are in position to observe the swims and setting up the deck protocol set forth by the Meet Referee. The following is a breakdown of those tasks:

Adjudicating a S&T call. The CJs are observing the S&T Officials, who, in turn, are observing the swims. When a S&T hand is raised, the CJ will come over to the S&T Official and discuss their jurisdiction, what they observed and which rule was violated. These questions are necessary to ensure we are giving the *benefit of the doubt to the swimmer*. The first question ensures the swimmer was in their jurisdiction, the second question allows the S&T official to "paint a picture" of what they observed allowing the CJ to visualize what happened. The last question is to ensure the official understands the rule and any interpretation.

The CJ may ask additional questions for clarity. For an example, a S&T Official made a call for delay in initiating the pull during a backstroke turn, the CJ may ask "which arm did they pull with." Another is a one-handed touch, they may ask which hand touched and which one missed. This additional information helps "complete the picture" for the CJ to ensure we are calling what we observed. Again, as an extension of the DR, the CJ wants to make sure that we have given the swimmer the *benefit of the doubt*.

Ensuring S&T Officials are in position. Prior to the start of a session, the CJ will make sure that they have all S&T Officials in place and will notify the Deck Referee of the same. Also, if they notice Turn officials are not standing over their lanes, they will remind them to do so. Remember, we are in a fishbowl as we are being watched by Coaches, swimmers and parents. If someone is standing back by the chairs and makes a non-simultaneous touch call, that leaves a lot of questions whether the swimmer received the *benefit of the doubt*! That's an extreme example to punctuate the point and we need to be in the proper position for all swimmers in order to provide fair and equitable conditions of competition.

Setting up the deck protocol. The session maybe running lead/lag for the stroke officials or using chase starts. This may be new to some officials or some other may be rusty. The CJ will be observing these protocols and mentoring the S&T officials to ensure they are following the prescribed technique noted in the briefing. Also, CJs set up the officials for relay take-offs and how the Meet Referee wants the deck will be set up for distance events.

CJs also want to make sure that the S&T Officials are receiving water, and providing breaks for those officials who drank too much water! They also check to ensure the relief official is coming back on time and is relieving Officials before the heat starts versus while the heat is the water. CJs may also be tasked with handing out the yellow copy of the disqualification slip to the Coaches and explaining the call. If the Coach has more questions about the call, the CJ will direct them to the Deck Referee.

These are the basics of the CJ function. We have CJ Manual on line (<http://www.virginiawimming.com/vsi/Official/OfficTrainings/TrainingInfo.html>) which goes into further detail. Most of the information in that manual is geared to championship meet format, however it is a great resource for your local swim meets as well.

Once you are comfortable as a CJ at your local meets, feel free to apply for a CJ position at Age Groups or Senior Championships and request and N2 evaluation. At these level of meets, we provide even more CJ Training. Recently, Erica LaFlace -Devito (GATR), John Rockwell (HOKI) and Deb Wojtkowski (SEVA) did just that and successfully completed their N2 evaluation. So if you know them, talk to them about their experience, I am sure they will all say it was a great experience, learned a lot and they are glad they did it!

Getting out of your Comfort Zone

I talk to a lot of officials to gauge their interest in advancement, do they have goals of working National Meets or are they just happy in their comfort zone. Some has no interest in working a National Meet, however, that should not impede them from learning. One myth that you may have heard is that the National Certification program is only if you want to work National Meets. That is **definitely** not true nor is that the intention the program.

So, what is the National Certification program all about? The grassroots development was designed to validate your LSC training. As by-product of that evaluation, the training and experience you receive ensures you are prepared to work National Meets.

Within VSI, we regularly hold evaluations for National Certification at our Age Group and Senior Championship meets. We do this at these meets because there is certain criteria that must be met to host what is called an Officials Qualifying Meet (OQM). In order to have an OQM designation, we send an application and the meet invite to the National Officials Committee for review. They, in turn, ensure all of the required criteria is met. Once they approve, the meet is designated as an OQM meet. The criteria for an OQM is normally not employed at a regular LSC meet, because we are not running a format that mirrors a National Meets. Therefore, we provide this training when we use National Meet protocols.

At the N2 level, your training will continue in the position you are working. As S&T you will learn about additional procedures and deck protocols. For instance, at Senior Champs, if you make a call, the first thing a CJ wants to hear is the lane of the infraction. Why? For two reasons, first to notify the DR and second, because another CJ needs to relocate behind the start end of that lane and in order to notify that swimmer of the infraction after they exit the pool. This is the same protocol used at National meets.

Starters learn about the importance of staying focused on the next heat, looking for any missing swimmer or some type of problem that may happen behind the block. For example, a goggle strap that breaks on a swimmer in lane 3 who is in the next heat which could delay the next start. They also work on patience when starting a race, allowing the ambient noise to quiet down prior to giving the command “take your mark” versus raising their voice in a microphone.

Deck Referees learn about controlling the pace of the meet, ensure all officials are in place prior to the start of heats, ensuring officials are observing swims, adjudicate calls, discussing calls with coaches and how to handle and set-up swim-offs.

The admin team learns about scratches, declared false starts, no-shows and penalty no-shows and all the necessary paperwork and timelines to set up the session.

These are just some highlights of the skills you will learn at these meets. Yes, there is correlation that these same concepts are employed at a National Level meet, however the end product is validation of training and additional learning opportunities.

Psychologists studied the comfort zone back in 1908, where an experiment explained it as “a state of relative comfort that creates a steady level of performance.” Leaving that state means increased risk and anxiety. Requesting an N2 evaluation, allows you to step out of your comfort zone and take risks in a controlled fashion while challenging yourself to things you normally would not consider. Your evaluator is the controlling aspect and they are there to mentor you and ensure your anxiety and risk is minimized. Your mentor is trained to gauge how much interaction you need and will base that on their conversations with you throughout the meet. The end game for an evaluator is to provide you with information, make sure you are comfortable with the established protocols and rules so you can successfully complete the evaluation to obtain your National certification.

Getting out of your Comfort Zone (cont.)

Some of you may remember David Walters. He swam for Coast Guard Blue Dolphins and went on to swim at the University of Texas. He also competed in the 2008 Olympics. David was addressing a group of swimmers about his pre-race routine. One swimmer said to David, “I really get nervous if I am in the final heat at championships, how do you control your nerves?” David’s answer resonated with me and responded, “Great question. Look at it this way, you got a lane, you got an opportunity. Take advantage and focus on that opportunity. Just because you are in lane 8, doesn’t mean you can’t have the best swim of your life.” Sage advice for a lot of life moments.

So, when you hear people say the National Certification program is for only working National Meets, that is not true and please dispel that myth. While that may one of the benefits of the program, it is really to validate your LSC training, allowing you to hone your craft and making you a better official that our athletes deserve, regardless of the level of meet. It also helps you become a better mentor for new officials, which continually improves our training program. Don’t be afraid of stepping out of your comfort zone, keep learning and challenging yourself. You got a lane, make the best of that opportunity!

Putting Away the Red Pen

Some of you may be wondering about the title of this section. Red pens are commonly used by Admin Officials when they are working meets. It used to be the trademark of the Timing Judges we had when we were creating session adjustments for times. That procedure has removed from the rules and so has the position. However, folks who were trained that way, still use red pens when working Admin.

If you worked the past VSI Senior Champs, you may have heard that Terry Randolph announced she is retiring from officiating. She is not leaving the sport entirely as she will continue to be our National Times Coordinator and Records Chair for Virginia Swimming. Terry’s favorite meet is Senior Champs working the Admin Table. If you had the pleasure to work with Terry, I am sure you can agree she is a wealth of knowledge! We are sad that she will no longer be on deck with us, however she has mentored a lot of us and we will definitely carry her torch!

Terry has been a USA Swimming Official since 1976, after 44 years I understand why she is putting away her red pen!

I asked Terry what officiating was like when she first started and how has swimming evolved since then.

“My training as an official was not as convenient as we now make it. We had to travel to wherever a training session was held. I did mine in Hopewell. Then we did our training walks at A meets. Since B meets were often held on Friday nights with the A meet following on Saturday. Often we, as trainees worked the B meets on Friday and returned for our training on Saturday. Sounds a little odd, but it worked very well and produced very high quality officials. We were a much smaller group than we have now and we worked when and where assigned rather than specifically when our swimmers were involved. When I had been a working official for about 4 years, Ethel Burchett, “Breezy”, looked at me one day and said, you need to go to a national meet. So I applied to a Junior Nationals in Huntsville and went. Since my family was still at home or in college I was not able to do as much on the national level as I would have liked but still managed to maintain my certifications. My husband joined me at many nationals later when the children were not at home. He was the only person I know who had a National Certification as a Head Timer.”

What about the evolution of admin at swim meets?

“When I started my experiences as a swimming official were much more labor intensive than they are now, mostly on what would become the “dry deck side”. Three timers with watches per lane were needed and a place judge for each lane on each side of the pool. There was a Clerk of Course who lined up swimmers after they were seeded into heats. Also, there were several scorers who took the times and the place judge results and balloted each heat to determine the order of finish. Then the official time was hand written, usually on a copy of the heat sheet, and posted on the wall. Parents, coaches and entry chairmen copied the times of their swimmers into their records. Following the meet a mimeographed copy of the results was prepared and mailed out to each team. The deck officials remained almost the same as we have currently with the exception of a CTS operator and a meet referee. The development of the first electronic timing system by Colorado timing was greeted with great pleasure. At first, it was very rudimentary as times needed to be hand copied from the machine.

Putting Away the Red Pen (cont.)

What about the camaraderie of Officiating?

"The first machine was started with a starting pistol. At one meet at Hampton University we used this in a rather different way. When the starting gun went off in a test start, a rubber chicken fell from the ceiling and fell at the feet of the referee. This was met with great amusement from all of the swimmers, spectators and the few officials who did not know of the joke."

How did the Administrative Referee role develop?

"With the greater emphasis on accuracy of times, the importance of the admin section was increased. The role of the Administrative Referee was augmented and a separate training progression was developed for it nationally. It became a very important position at major meets, having authority in referee matters as well as the administrative positions of the timing and scoring sections."

What about the introduction of using software versus index cards and ballots?

"Since we now had a good timing system we needed a way to actually run the meet electronically. My husband built one based on a Lotus spread sheet with lots of macros. It worked quite well but he was the only one who could use it which was very limiting. We were overjoyed when Hy-Tek developed Meet Manager and we recommended it to VSI. We were among the first LSCs to start using it and today it remains an excellent program as it handles all the complexities of modern meets with such ease.

USA Swimming finally got tired of trying to connect all the separate databases that existed at headquarters and bit the bullet . They contracted for the development of a central database that would provide access to data that could be used in many different ways. That was SWIMS. It has made life much easier for those of us who deal with times and registration. Also, it is easier for teams to see their own statistics as well as LSCs to communicate with each other and to find information more readily.

Working at national meets has become easier in many ways as more meets are now offering national certification. With the assistance of our LSC with the financial costs our officials are taking advantage of working at different types of meets and communicating with officials from many different locations. We have come a very long way in what has been a short time.

How has USA Swimming changed since you first started?

In response to the changes in society and demographics, USA Swimming has changed too. We have gone from an organization run primarily by its members with a limited staff presence to one that has a full complement of hired staff doing most of the work. Volunteers have few positions left to fill. This is probably in response to the problems finding people with enough time to do the extra work. Under our newest CEO there is considerable reorganization going on at headquarters and I hope it will have a positive effect. Certainly the organization will continue to keep growing and improving and fulfilling its main objective of promoting swimming at all levels, and inspiring our young athletes to become the best they can be. I am so glad to have been a part of it for so long."

Terry, In regards to your closing line we are very lucky to have you in our LSC. A BIG THANK YOU from all of us especially for everything you have done for our Sport! You will be missed on deck, but we still have your phone number!

Ways to communicate

Club Chairs and District Chairs. This is a good time to keep in touch with each other. Although we are practicing social distancing, there is free software available to hold video conferences. Some of you may be using these platforms for work and they are a great way to keep in touch with your officials. Now is a good time to set up these types of meetings to chat with your officials and make sure everyone is OK. Plus it breaks up the monotony of our current daily grind!

One platform is ZOOM. You can download a free version and hold video conferences for up to 40 minutes. If you have Microsoft Office on your computer, you can download Microsoft Teams and set up conferences as well. There is also Skype where you can do the same, just to name a few.

The LSC Officials Committee voted to start using some of these platforms for future clinics. We'll send out the notices of clinics to the club officials chair and post them on VSI Website. For these clinics, we will have a sign up sheet and limit the numbers in order to manage the volume. However, based on the success of the trial runs, we will most likely hold these more often.

As a side note, Potomac Valley Swimming has been using on-line training for a couple of years and have had very good success. While we cannot predict an end date to this current crisis, we think now is a good time to add this type of training to our program.

You Make the Call, Resolution

Recommended Resolution: The first thing the referee should do is instruct the Timing Equipment Operator to turn off the timing in Lane 3, so no time is recorded. Yes, a penalty is in order, not a disqualification. In this example, the Referee looked for the missing swimmer and did not see any swimmer behind lane three and therefore the penalty is to treat the athlete as a "no show". Any administrative penalties for a "no show" would also be applicable as well. This is NOT a delay of meet, as no delay occurred.

For starters, this is a key talking point when you hold your timer's brief. Have the timers keep the swimmers behind the timer chairs. That way the Referee and Starter have a clear view of all the swimmers in the heat. At some pools this can be difficult to manage and enforce because of the small deck space behind the blocks. If that is the case, then the referee needs conduct a little investigation to uncover why it happened. Basically, they need to determine if the athlete was held up by the timers or not ready to swim. If the first, the referee has an option to offer a re-swim for that athlete. Remember, Timers are officials and if it is our fault we have to correct that mistake. If the swimmer was not ready to swim, then the athlete is penalized with a no-show.

In either case the referee needs to have a discussion with the athlete's coach to ensure there is no repeat of this extremely unsafe conduct. Swimmers are responsible for their swims and they need to be ready when their event and heat is called to the blocks.

Thanks for all you do for our Sport!

All prior newsletters can be found at : <http://www.virginiaswimming.com/vsi/Official/Resource/NewsLetter/PreviousNewsletters.html>

If you have questions or comments/suggestions or a topic for the newsletter, drop us a note!

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